



# IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

February 2016

**“Even now,” declares the Lord,  
“return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting and weeping and  
mourning.”**

**Rend your heart and not your  
garments.**

**Return to the Lord your God,  
for He is gracious and  
compassionate,  
slow to anger and abounding in love,  
and He relents from sending  
calamity.**

**(Joel 2:12-13)**

***Published by:***

*The Life in the Spirit Communities of the Catholic  
Charismatic Renewal, Colombo, Sri Lanka,  
(With Ecclesiastical Approval).*

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# **On our Knees In His Hands**

*February 2016*

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**“The Lord will look upon my afflictions and make up with benefits”****2 Samuel 16:12**

2 Samuel 15:13-  
14,30, 16:5-13

Psalm 3:2-7

Mark 5:1-20

The Lord said in the realm of this world, we will experience many troubles, but in His world we will share in His peace. Through His death and resurrection he has overpowered what this world may throw at us. When we take this reality from a mere thought and pray through it, then it becomes an inner experience leading from death to life.

In today's reading, Absalom, David's own son seeks to destroy his father and take over his throne. This is a common trait in this world where we are seeking absolute power. King David becomes a victim of it. Someone else throws stones at David, motivated by Absalom's rise of power. Yet David refuses to react, defend or take revenge. He holds this thought in prayer, "the Lord will look at my affliction and make-up with benefits far greater". He shows us how to deal with those who come into our lives and seek to destroy us, throw hurtful words at us or create terrifying situations for us. Following King David's example, we need not go tit-for-tat and seek revenge. This inner response evokes a puzzling response from others as it did among David's people. God's great strength is revealed in our weakness. Our weakness and helplessness activates God's action of mercy.

The Lord calls us to give an inner response to our brothers and sisters in the world. The Lord goes into pagan territory which symbolizes the secular world. The Lord had the ability to directly confront the one responsible for bringing affliction and sin. A man possessed by an evil spirit comes running to our Lord Jesus because no one was strong enough to subdue or have control over the demon. Just as the man ran to the Lord in the Gospel, we too can look forward to seeing Him who has power when we discover we have none. God will finally overthrow every evil power that comes against us. The Lord goes into the territory of the evil one to set this possessed man free. Does this not show that God wants to heal and bless even those who cause so much disturbance? The Lord knows what sins and addictions we are unwillingly bound to. God's power operates in even the most chaotic situations. He delivers us from living in this world of sin and addiction and entrusts the mission of God to us. Today the Lord expects us to set others free and He is asking us: are we ready to take up this challenge?

***Prayer: Abba Father, may I be baptised in Your Holy Spirit and fire each moment my heart feels disturbed or afraid to receive Your peace inside me. Amen.***

**“Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.”****Luke 2:27**

Malachi 3:1-4 or

Hebrews 2:14-18

Psalm 24:7-10

Luke 2:22-40

Today the Church celebrates the Presentation of the Lord Jesus in the temple. God who became an infant allows His human parents to present Him as a sacrifice to the Father. The Lord Jesus, who became one of us in everything except sin, has left us a lifetime lesson through this great event.

When the parents brought our Lord Jesus as a baby to the temple, two individuals had a unique experience of seeing the face of God while others simply saw a baby. Simeon and Anna had the experience given in Malachi 3:1, “Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple”. What did the two of them have that others did not? They had prepared their hearts and were waiting for the Messiah. Malachi 3:2 says “But who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears?” Simeon and Anna could stand when the Lord appeared, simply because they had gone through the preparation and purification process beforehand.

The Gospel says that Simeon was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel and that the Holy Spirit was upon him (Luke 2:25). What do these words tell us? Simeon was a man seeking the heart of God and made righteous through his relationship with God. His priorities were those of the Kingdom and because of this the favour of God was upon him. Thus he was moved by the Holy Spirit to go to meet the Messiah he had been waiting for. Anna was a woman the world would pity and label as “unlucky or cursed” because she had become a widow just seven years after marriage. Will you and I call her life a blessed one? If this had happened to us, could we believe that the Lord was doing something great in and through that situation? Anna allowed the Lord to purify and refine her without wallowing in self-pity or running around seeking love from the world. She chose to never leave God and led a life of worship, fasting and praying. This allowed the Lord to prepare Anna for the wonderful face-to-face encounter with the Messiah.

Therefore let us learn from the lives of these two blessed people. Let us search for our own ‘gates’ and ‘ancient doors’ of anger, addictions, self-pity and self-righteousness and allow the Holy Spirit to lift them up, so that the King of Glory may come in to live in our hearts (Ps24:7).

***Prayer: Abba Father, purify and refine me today so that my life becomes a worthy offering to Your Son. I pray that one day I too will be worthy enough to be privileged to see the Lord Jesus face-to-face. Amen.***

“Jesus himself was astounded by their lack of faith.”

Mark 6:6

2 Samuel 24:2,  
9-17

Psalm 32:1-2, 5-7

Mark 6:1-6

Christian living is purely based on faith in an Almighty God whose unconditional love brought forth His only begotten Son to this world in order that the sin of the world would be forgiven forever. Can a human mind with its limited thinking comprehend such a mystery? To comprehend and believe indeed is faith, which is only through the grace of God.

There can be no faith without true repentance. In the First Reading we see the consequences of King David's sin following him through the stages of his life. Yet, King David, as the Word of God says, was a man after God's own heart. He was the anointed one and the chosen one despite his sinfulness. He repented deeply yet he had to face the consequences of his sin.

How did King David face these severe trials? Psalm 32 today speaks of a faith in God that comes through the blessedness of forgiveness. In Psalm 32:7 King David says "You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance". With every trial that was permitted by God in his life, King David's faith in God was firmly in place as he came before God day and night in communion, repentance, praise and worship. His faith was made strong and this enabled King David to carry through the will of God for Israel.

In the Gospel reading today we see the Lord Jesus, full of wisdom, returning to His own home and preaching the Gospel in a manner which astounded His listeners. The human weakness of rejection and jealousy is seen among His fellow countrymen. They cannot accept their neighbor and carpenter and the son of a lowly woman to be preaching as the accepted and learned society elites would.

"Prophets are despised only in their own country, among their relatives and in their own family". It is true that all of us who have been called by the Lord Jesus have experienced this rejection among our family and friends. Therefore, the readings today pose a challenge to us. Are we humble enough as King David was to go before God in repentance and receive the blessed assurance of forgiveness and live our Christian faith or are we like the neighbours and countrymen of the Lord Jesus? Judgmental and rebellious, rejecting God and living a life that lacks faith with no hope or miracles and is dead within?

**Prayer: Abba Father, give me a true heart of repentance at all times so that I will hear Your Word and my faith may ever increase. Amen.**

## Thursday 4th February *Our Lady of Lanka; Independence Day*

“But now the Lord says, ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you’.”

**Isaiah 43:1**

Isaiah 43:1-5

96:1-3, 7-10

Acts 1:12-13, 2:1-2,  
4-8, 11

Mathew 2:1-2, 7-12

A shrine to Our Lady of Lanka was erected to protect Sri Lankans from the horrors of war. The Missionaries of Mercy have been interceding to her continuously for all affected by the war. Today we continue to have this same faith and belief in her protection for our country. Since then we have seen many horrific experiences of an ethnic war that destroyed lives. However, through it all we have seen new beginnings and a glimmer of light

at the end of the tunnel as we continue to pray for the intercession of our Lady of Lanka. On this day we honor her as the Patroness of Sri Lanka.

The First Reading from Isaiah 43 reflects powerfully on God’s protection and concern for His people. His promises are for redemption and restoration. We continue to have this hope for our country which has been devastated through in the aftermath of a war which claimed many thousands of lives; creating division, dissension and inner conflict.

In the Acts of the Apostles we see the Apostles who were devastated with the crucifixion now drawing strength from the scriptures. Mother Mary was an integral part of this waiting for the promised Holy Spirit as she joined them constantly in prayer. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit’s anointing is so powerful that they were declaring the wonders of God in the different languages and tongues. All the people were amazed and perplexed. It is this same Holy Spirit that is giving us the power to repent and forgive.

The Gospel Reading tells us that the birth of Christ was made known to the Magi through a star. They are traditionally known as wise men who never knew God nor the scriptures but were solely led by a star to the Saviour who was to bring freedom to a world that was lost and immersed in sin.

It is through the greater intercession of the Blessed Mother that people have experienced healing and liberation. She was the star that led thousands of people to a powerful state of repentance, forgiveness and healing. Thousands of devotees at the Shrine of our Lady of Madhu experienced a historic event of God’s powerful healing. Our prayer should be for her to continue to influence our lives and our country.

***Prayer: Abba Father, our prayer is that through the intercession of Our Lady of Lanka that our country would find forgiveness and healing. Amen.***

**“The Lord forgave him his sins and exalted his strength forever”**

**Sirach 47:11**

Sirach 47:2-13

Psalm 18:31, 47,  
50-51

Mark 6:14-29

The Book of Sirach mentions a beautiful explanation of King David. King David was a person trapped in sin. Entrenched in his desires of the flesh, his intention was to take the wife of Uriah for himself. He sends Uriah to the battlefield, allows him to be killed and marries the wife of Uriah. David thought no one knew this, but God saw it. Through Prophet Nathan God reveals to David his sin and he accepts it, repents and receives forgiveness from the Lord. God turns that curse into a blessing. After David, God gives the crown to his son, Solomon and blesses him too.

Today St. Mark's Gospel mentions another king – King Herod. He too, sunk in his desires of the flesh, marries his brother's wife, Herodias. John the Baptist shows King Herod the wrong he did, but Herod does not accept it. He does not repent and therefore does not receive forgiveness from God. He remains in his sin. That curse drives his life to further darkness. Herod did not plan to kill John the Baptist. Yet that day, at the banquet he had to fulfill the promise that he gave to the daughter of Herodias. He did not want to lose his honour in the presence of his guests.

Forgiveness of sin is a great gift that we have received from God. It is the beginning of turning the curses of our lives to a blessing. Yet, today many of us are reluctant to go for confession. However this sacrament is a great gift that we have received from God. At that time if Herod accepted his sin and received forgiveness from God, his entire life could have changed. Even though David did wrong he received great blessings because he repented, sought forgiveness and was forgiven by God.

Though we try to hide our sin from others the Lord sees them. He will show us our sin in various ways. It is not His will to see us destroyed. Therefore let us accept our sin and repent. Then our curses will turn into blessings. Herod who did not want to lose his honour in the presence of his guests, to answer the request of that girl, destroys one precious life and destroys himself. As mentioned in the Book of Sirach, David gives glory to God in all his deeds and the Lord forgives his sins and exalts his strength forever. He calls each of us to this kind of life - forgiven, free of shame and guilt and living in the presence of God. Let us enter into a life to give glory to God in all our deeds instead of receiving honour in the presence of others.

***Prayer: Abba Father, You forgive me my sins. You transform my darkness into light. Thank you. Amen.***

**“...His heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd”**

**Mark 6:34**

1 Kings 3:4 – 13

Psalms 119:9 – 14

Mark 6: 30 – 34

The promises which were given to King David by God were fulfilled in the life of Solomon. King Solomon had wisdom to ask for wisdom. He was not a warrior like his father, but he was given the responsibility of a king whilst he was still young. He needed wisdom to guide his nation.

We are given opportunities in life. Are we making the right choices? Often we are focused on the material and fathomable things in life. We are lost in the material gain and other people. Eventually we become slaves of these things.

Young Solomon asked for something that no person could take away from him. Would the present day young people ask for such gifts from God? The favour of God was upon Solomon already even before he was blessed with wisdom. The faithfulness of God to David was upon Solomon too. Young people need to ask for wisdom from God and parents need to live in faithfulness to God, so that we could live under the anointing and favour of God.

In today's Gospel Reading the twelve Apostles return and the faithfulness of God is upon them. God has a mysterious way of working. The moment the Lord Jesus and the Apostles were moving away from the crowds they ran after them. This teaches us something. When we win the favour of God we are attracted by those who are in need of God's favour. Unknowingly we become the channels of God's love, mercy and favour towards other people.

To live a life of being a channel of God's love, we need to be selfless. It's evident in the lives of St. Paul Miki and his companions. St. Paul Miki and his 25 companions were martyred at Nagasaki in Japan in 1597. They were crucified and stabbed with spears. They were the first martyrs of Far East Asia to be canonized. Could it be that you and I are called in this era to be martyrs of God? Could we give up our selfish motives and say like St. Paul Miki said, "Like my master, a lance will pierce my heart so that my blood and my love can flow out upon the land and sanctify it to His name".

The compassionate Shepherd continues to love and have pity on His people. Therefore He raises up people from time to time to be faithful to Him and to lay down their lives for His sheep and Church. "I willingly forgive the king and all those who have desired my death", is what St. Paul Miki said.

Prayer: Abba Father, cause me to live a committed and a dedicated selfless life to spread the Kingdom of God. Amen.

**“But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”**

**Luke 5:5**

Isaiah 6:1-2, 3-8

Ps. 138: 1-5, 7-8

1 Cor. 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Today is the last Sunday before the season of Lent. It is not by chance that the Church presents to us the call to discipleship or ministry. It is needless to say that anyone who undertakes this journey needs to have a commitment to travel the full distance and ultimately reach the final destination. Likewise we are invited by the Lord to be His disciples and share His life and allow Him to share ours in an intimate relationship.

The First Reading tells us about the calling of Isaiah. The moment Isaiah had a glimpse of God's glory, the truth of his heart came out with a cry; "I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). The repentance was followed by a cleansing process with no questions asked. This was my own experience and I believe it is so for most of us. It was during a Four Steps Retreat that I received the grace to be flooded by the love of God and out poured the truth of my heart which had been hidden and masked until then. A live coal was inside me until the truth was given to the Lord at the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Through this sacrament I was forgiven and loved by God. I heard the most irrational words in my depths, inviting me to give my life to the Lord. Thus the purification has to precede the hearing and accepting the call to discipleship.

St. Luke vividly describes the event of Lord Jesus calling His first disciples. There was nothing magical or supernatural in the circumstances. The Lord used a nearby boat as a makeshift stage to preach and teach people. One could clearly see that it was not by accident that the Lord got into the boat of St. Peter. Having finished preaching, once the crowd disperses, the Lord asks St. Peter to "put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4). Was the Lord trying to repay St. Peter when He gave the seemingly irrational and illogical instructions, coming from a Rabbi to a seasoned fisherman? It was the grace of God that gave the inner freedom to St. Peter to oblige with no resistance.

This moment of grace is given to all of us. Do we let it pass us by or respond like St. Peter? St Peter's response led to an awesome miracle. In actual fact it is that the activator of that miracle was St. Peter, not the Lord Jesus. The Lord as the author of the whole creation, had already willed a massive swarm of fish to flock in that area of the sea, but if St. Peter did not oblige, the miracle would not have had taken place. I wonder how many such miracles I would have lost, simply because I didn't trust my Lord enough to obey His Word?

As with prophet Isaiah, St. Peter had the truth gushing out of his heart and out through his mouth by admitting his unworthiness. He fell at the feet of the Lord Jesus, confessing his sinfulness. How do we respond to the wonders the Lord has done and still continues to do in our lives? Do we imitate prophet Isaiah and St. Peter by experiencing a deep internal breaking that reveals our own sinfulness and unworthiness? Or do we become proud and arrogant and boast about our spirituality? Or do we thank the Lord, leave Him and go back to our old ways?

St. Peter, having heard his call to discipleship at the feet of the Lord Jesus, left everything and followed the Master. No one can follow the Lord with baggage. This is true for all of us, immaterial of our age, status and wealth. Neither prophet Isaiah nor St. Peter had any clear idea of what this call was all about and we are no different. Yet it did not matter to them anymore, for both of them knew that “the One who called them was all powerful and absolutely faithful”.

In the Second Reading St. Paul speaks about his own calling to become an apostle of the Lord whom he persecuted severely. Here too, the Lord decides that St. Paul, then Saul, be called to discipleship. Why? Because He is GOD and “all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27). St. Paul’s experience teaches us that it is only by the grace of God, that each one of us has received the call to an intimate relationship with our Lord Jesus. Human qualifications don’t mean much in the Kingdom of God. This is so that no one can boast about his or her call but instead humble themselves giving all the glory to God.

How should we respond to this great call? As St. Paul says, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His Grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them- yet not I, but the Grace of God that was with me” (1 Cor 15:10).

What does this call do to us? It changes us from within. We may have lived and prayed as good Catholics but bowed down to many worldly gods, such as the god of money, power and fame; living and reacting the same way as those who do not know the Lord Jesus. Now this call to discipleship empowers us to bow before the One and true God alone, ready to lose all other gods. We are greatly emboldened to know that we have the most powerful and the richest Father in the whole universe, who answers us when we call (Psalm 138:3). His unfailing love and faithfulness are enough to assure us a life of peace, love, joy and freedom.

So today, before we set about our daily work and chores, let us be mindful of the call God has placed on our lives. In everything we do, let us ask the Lord for guidance and He will lead us through our day.

***Prayer: Abba Father, here am I, send me. Amen.***

“Let us enter into his dwelling, let us worship at his footstool”

Psalm 132:7

1 Kings 8:1-7,  
9-13

Psalm 132:6-10

Mark 6:53-56

The First Reading today shows us the glory of God that filled the temple as the Israelites worshiped and brought offerings to the Lord. It was the festival where the Ark of the Covenant was brought to the temple that King Solomon built. The Ark of the Covenant was the presence of God. Wherever the Ark of the Covenant went God was present. That is why the Ark of the Covenant was taken to every battle field. Inside the Ark of the

Covenant were the stone tablets which Moses placed. It contained the Commandments given by God to Moses. There was something more than just the stone tablets in the Ark of Covenant. It was the very presence of God. When it was brought into the temple the entire temple was filled with God's presence and glory. God was present in the Word. It is this Word that became flesh and came to live among us (John 1:14)- The Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is the Word and the very presence of God. Wherever He went He carried the presence and the glory of God. Just like the Ark of the Covenant.

For this reason people were attracted to the Lord Jesus. People gathered wherever the Lord Jesus went and when they encountered Him they were healed and transformed. In the Old Testament the Israelites brought offerings to the Lord but in the New Testament the people brought themselves just the way they were to the Lord Jesus. Whether they were sick or in trouble; they came as they were to God. They themselves were an offering to God. The Lord Jesus never turned down anyone who came to Him. He first loved them regardless of who they are, what they had done, what sickness they carried or what social status they belonged to. None of those mattered to the Lord Jesus. He simply loved, accepted and forgave all. As a result of their offering they were healed and transformed.

Today, the Lord Jesus is offering us this same chance- to be healed and transformed. Some of us carry the idea that we are too sinful and we want to wait until we have changed to go Him. However, the Lord invites us to come to Him just as we are and to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to Him. Then we will be able to fully experience God's presence, love and mercy in our lives. The love of the Lord Jesus which is unconditional and has no limits or boundaries envelops us and changes everything. Sicknesses are healed and lives are transformed through His love and power.

**Prayer: Abba Father, we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice. May we experience Your love and presence in our lives today. Amen.**

## Can it be that God dwells among men on earth?

1 Kings 8:27

1 Kings 8:22-23,

27-30

Ps. 83:3-5,10-11

Mark 7:1-13

In the First Reading King Solomon stands before the alter in the presence of the whole community of Israel. He utters a poignant prayer to God on behalf of all the people. Solomon is so concerned for his people that he calls for the renewing of the covenant of God's love, with all His faithful servants. He calls for God to hear their petitions and pardon their offences. His deep relationship with God evokes a deep relationship with the people.

God's presence is revealed in the community. In his surprise he asks "can it indeed be that God dwells among men on earth?" (V 27).

God came to dwell among His people by sending His only Son. He institutionalised the Eucharist by giving us His body and blood. We commemorate that day daily, where He showed His sacrificial love. He washed His disciples feet and showed He is among us as One who He serves and cares for us. We are baptized into Christ to form one body united with one another. United that what we do affects the other. The love and forgiveness we show others would reveal God's presence to the world. "See how they love one another" said the people in the Book of Acts.

In the Gospel we see the importance of the cleansing and purifying of our attitudes. The Pharisees and Scribes find fault with the Lord's disciples. They had stopped the ritual of washing before eating. The disciples failed to follow the Jewish traditional practices of ritual purification. The issue was not about hygiene. The Pharisees were more concerned in the ritual cleansing of utensils and not in the cleansing and purifying of hearts and minds. Their sense of the sacred was lost in their excessive stressing of liturgy. It ended in ritualism which the Lord found fault with.

The sacredness of our liturgy has to make us aware of the importance of washing one another's feet. Christ knew the importance of washing another's feet and desired to be the servant of all. God's sacred trait of mercy, forgiveness and love should be shown through such. The external signs of our liturgy must unfold the deeper reality of the sacred. The presbyter we call father should really be like a father, who like King Solomon be genuinely concerned about the children. Then they shall lead and make supplication to God on behalf of others. Then shall we see God living among His people.

**Prayer:** *Lord give us Your heart of compassion at the Eucharistic table, so that we may have the boldness to love and serve without fear, to bring heaven to earth. Amen.*

**“The Lord was jealous for his land and took pity on his people”**

**Joel 2:18**

Joel 2:12-18  
Ps. 51:3-6,  
12-14, 17  
2 Cor. 5:20, 6:2  
Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18

Today is Ash Wednesday. This day we are reminded of our sins and that we are nothing more than dust and to dust we shall return. If we ponder on this, it means that everything we value, treasure and so dearly care for is merely dust like you and I. But today also begins a story of a God who looked upon this dust and showed a love to it-- a love that reached beyond all times and generations.

This God created all things, has no beginning and no end, is all powerful and all knowing. This God became a spec of dust and walked amongst His own creation. He reached out further by becoming sin on the cross, making an atonement for our sins by sacrificing His own body and blood so that we who are mere dust particles lost in sin and darkness could become the very righteousness of God. This is unheard of in any other religion or philosophy. Every other religion teaches us that we have to make a sacrifice or we have to become good to reach God. In our case, the Lord Jesus has become the sacrifice to transform our lives.

Today sadly many have forgotten what God has done for us. Many have forgotten that salvation is a free gift from God to be received as we receive His Son our Lord Jesus Christ into our lives. Many of us live in self righteousness and want to show people our spirituality. Many of us, as mentioned in the Gospel reading do things to be seen by others. Even our walk with God is self-centered and not heaven-centered. We follow God for an earthly reward and not a heavenly reward. The Lord Jesus warns us that seeking a worldly reward for our spirituality will inturn give us an earthly reward. Because we have worked for an earthly reward we do not have any other reward waiting for us when their life on earth is over.

As we enter into Ash Wednesday today let us look at the heart of the Lord. The Lord was jealous for His land (Joel 2:18). “His land” is your heart and my heart. For we are the temple of God, His dwelling place. Even though it has been occupied by other gods we worship like the god of lust, the god of money or making our own selves a god; today He sees His people suffering because of this and He has pity on His people.

“Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all Your heart” (Joel 2:12), “Rend Your heart and not Your Garment”(Joel 2:13). The Lord seeks His dwelling place in the hearts of people. He says, “Open your heart to me” and reaches out to us. “Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding

in love”(Joel 2:13). He reaches out to us in His eternal love. Not to punish but to redeem.

So today, we must return to the Lord. The question is how do we turn to Him? We turn to Him through the Four Steps. In the first step He invites us to come as we are. Whatever we may have gone through, whatever we may have done that we think is unforgivable today we know that His love for us has not changed. For He said “I have loved you with an everlasting love and I have drawn you with my loving kindness” (Jeremiah 31:3), “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me” (Isaiah 49:15-16). These are the promises of God; of His faithfulness and love. We are called to come as we are and believe and accept these promises of God.

In the second step we must give the truth of our hearts to God and accept the fact that we are sinners and not able to walk and live a holy life by our own strength. When we come to Him and tell Him our sins and truly repent, His precious blood flows into our hearts and lives and cleanses us, purifying us whiter than snow. Whatever we had done before this is washed away and He gives us a brand new slate to start again. He gives us as many chances as we need when we come to Him with the truth of our hearts.

In the third step, once we repent of our sinful ways, we can surrender our lives to God. When we give Him the authority of our lives, we no longer need to worry about doing the right thing or saying the right thing. For He will lead us into holiness. In the fourth step, He will fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit and bring the life transforming power of God into our hearts and lives. Then again the Lord will come to His dwelling place and into His land; that is the hearts of His people.

Today, let us leave behind our past motives for doing good and wanting to project our goodness to others. He calls us to shift from an earth-centered living to a heaven-centered living. Let us accept the call of the Lord Jesus to do things with one motive in mind - to please the Father in Heaven. God is not looking at what we do outside but He sees into the hearts of people. He wants to live in the hearts of His people, so let us make Him a dwelling place. As we enter into Ash Wednesday let Him make us clean from our sins.

***Prayer: Abba Father, today we remember that we are nothing but dust and we believe in Your love and that You love us as we are. We come into the grace of salvation and give You our lives. We want You to come and live in us and make our hearts Your dwelling place. As we repent of our ways cleanse our hearts and prepare them for Your holy presence to live in and through our lives. We thank You for doing this in our lives. Amen.***

## Choose life through death

Deuteronomy  
30:15–20

Psalm 1:1–4, 6

Luke 9:22–25

Yesterday we were reminded about death; that we have come from dust and ashes and we will one day return to dust and ashes. Today we are being reminded of a fact of life that we face from moment to moment, the need to make decisions that can lead to life or death.

On a trip to Kandy, we happened to pass by the National Railway Museum and on a hunch we chose to stop by and visit the place. It turned out to be such an interesting time and we were so enlightened after that stop. Often we say “if only” we had done this or that and made a different decision things would not have or would have unfolded the way they did. We chose to stop by the museum and had a rich experience.

In our Christian life, this decision making takes an interesting turn. We are called to choose death; death to our ways of thinking, death to our greed and death to our desire to acquire more and more. When we choose death, we actually receive life. The problem is our notion of life is that if we have more, it will lead to a more abundant life, but the reality is that if we have less in our possession and what we depend on we will begin to have more.

The people of Israel were instructed to choose life, through the choices they were going to make. Choosing life is choosing to be obedient to the leading of the Spirit. When we begin a journey to live in the Spirit, it is in plain terms, a journey of obedience to the prompting of the Spirit. Often it will seem foolish to the world, we will be misunderstood and we will have much to explain, but it will bring life to us.

The Lord Jesus by choosing a life of suffering and death, was choosing eternal life for Himself and for us. Through His obedience He accepted the plan of the Father which seemed foolish to the disciples. Here was a man with so much power, authority and a following who was allowing people to impose a cross on Him and opting to die. But that cross ultimately bought freedom and life to us. Let us ask God for the grace to shut off our ways of rationalising and understanding and switch to the ways of the Kingdom. We are called to choose life by taking up our cross, embracing it and following the example of our Lord. Let us not be namesake Christians but lovers of the Lord, who at every moment opt for the Lord's way of responding.

**Prayer: Abba Father, break my reality of life that I may choose to embrace the cross as Your Son Jesus did. Amen.**

## Come follow me

Isaiah 58:1–9

Ps. 51:3–6, 18–19

Matthew 9:14–15

On this third day of lent 2016—the extraordinary jubilee year of mercy as proclaimed by Pope Francis— the Lord Jesus in this episode emphasises that He wants us to be merciful more than engaging in and sometimes being proud of fasting and other sacrifices like the ritual offering of animals.

We see in this episode the discerning wisdom of the prayerful Lord Jesus. Tax collectors at that time were despised by most Jewish leaders and other self-righteous people because most of the tax collectors were known to be racketeers. The tax collectors were known to collect at least thrice the amount they were supposed to collect, part of it went to the Roman government and part of it into their own pockets. Some of the religious leaders, mainly the Sadducees were also secretly engaging in such frauds which took place mainly in the temple. They were defrauding huge sums of money from people. That is why the Lord Jesus, who with the gifts of wisdom and revelation, was aware of what was happening and chased the traders out of the temple saying “you have turned by Father’s house into a den of robbers”. The Lord Jesus knew the racketeering traders were giving part of the money they plundered to the temple priests. While indulging in such sanctimonious humbug or fraud, they were condemning and had virtually excommunicated tax collectors like Matthew.

Most of these tax collectors like Matthew and Zacchaeus, though wealthy, were obviously not happy. Just as Zacchaeus climbed the sycamore tree because he wanted to see the Lord, Matthew also must have been waiting for a chance to turn away from his selfishness and wickedness. So when the Lord Jesus came by him and told Matthew to follow Him, his attitude was clear when he immediately left his tax collection booth, perhaps money and all, to follow the Lord. Indeed the Lord Jesus must have seen the potential in Matthew because this one time racketeer eventually turned out to be the writer of the first Gospel.

Today, the Lord is calling us just as He called the tax collector Matthew. He calls us to leave behind our lives and sin and come follow Him. For when we do we have a great future of love and mercy to look forward to.

**Prayer: Abba Father, in this Year of Mercy give us the grace to change the world by receiving and giving mercy. Amen.**

“Hear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.”

Ps.86:1

Isaiah 58:9-14

Psalms 86:1-6

Luke 5:27-32

This is the year of mercy. This year the Lord Jesus is specially inviting all who are sinful, weak, broken and helpless to come to Him. How is He doing this?

Today, in the Gospel of Luke we come across the way the Lord Jesus attracts Levi the tax collector sitting at his tax booth. Levi was a sinful man. His profession was sinful. His thoughts, desires, behavior, actions and the way of he lived was sinful. The heart of the Lord Jesus opened for the sake of Levi. The Lord Jesus loved this man who was trapped in his sinfulness. The Lord knew that Levi could not leave his life of sin on his own and through his own strength. The words that the Lord Jesus spoke to him were filled with His love and compassion. The power of the love of the Lord Jesus changed the life of Levi. He gave up the way he behaved, the way he lived and the way he acted and followed the Lord Jesus. Levi recognized the real purpose of his life and committed his whole life to it.

This Lent the Lord Jesus is inviting us to do the same. None of us is perfect. One way or the another we live stuck in our own sinfulness and weakness. He is saying to us, “Come as you are. I love you. My heart is open for you.” This Lent through repentance let us enter into this love. As it says in Psalm 86:1, in His presence let us acknowledge our sinfulness, weakness and helplessness. It is only the Lord Jesus who can bring light into the lives that are lost in darkness. He alone can heal our wounded and broken hearts. That is why the Lord Jesus says in Luke 5:32, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Our response to His call would be to acknowledge that we are sinners and unable to change by our own strength and follow Him.

Therefore in this year of mercy, as we step into Lent, let us turn to the Lord Jesus in repentance. Let us enter into His love that flows out from His mercy, give Him the truth of our heart and cleanse ourselves. Let us surrender our lives to the Lord Jesus and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us try and remain in Him 24 hours of the day. As we are healed and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit, like the Lord Jesus did, we may also be able to open our hearts to another sinner and contribute to save a life of another Levi.

**Prayer: Abba Father, hear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Help me at my hour of need. Amen.**

Declare with your mouth and believe in your heart and you will be saved.

*Romans 10:9*

Deuteronomy  
26:4-10

Psalms 91:1-2, 10-15

Romans 10:8-13

Luke 4:1-13

In our earthly journey we face changing circumstances and are called to adapt to them with the wisdom of the spirit, with love, obedience and responsiveness to God's leading.

Deuteronomy was termed the second law as it detailed the application of the law. It so happened that the circumstances of the lives of the people of Israel began to change. All along they lived like nomads moving from place to place, but finally they had come to settle in the land of Canaan. While their new habitation was a blessing, it also presented them with opportunities to sin. In the past they had been disobedient to God. While on the move, God fed them with manna, but now their dependence would shift to planting and harvesting. Therefore, they needed guidance to live their new life in Canaan. Additionally, the idol worship of the Canaanites could influence and affect their lives. Given all these threats, they were given the Book of Deuteronomy which warned them yet encouraged them. They were encouraged to choose life instead of death. In Canaan, life would be a normal and worldly existence which could steer them away from a journey with the Father.

The particular verses in the First Reading, refer to the first offerings that were to be offered to God. The practice of tithing referred not only to money but the first fruit of the field. One was encouraged to give the very best to God in thankfulness. We are called to give the best years of our life to God. The practice and general thinking is that when we retire and after we have done our duty earning for our family, we should spend time with God. But God's desire is that we offer Him the prime time of our life as an offering to Him. In the days of Moses, people could be trusted to give their tithe offering. Hence, when they came to the temple they were encouraged to openly declare their offering in thankfulness to God saving them and bringing them into the Promised Land. Once they gave their offering they would worship God by prostrating before Him.

If we think a little deeper, praise and thanksgiving is also a time when we publicly acknowledge all that God has done in our lives. People are so reluctant to do it assuming that it is not a Catholic way of praying. However, the Psalms especially between Psalm 100 to 150 contain verses in praise of God. Take a break and offer up to

God thanksgiving and praise, loudly and publicly for all the good He has done and then worship Him by bending down before Him out of honour and respect to Him.

Just like the people of Israel who were embarking on a new life, our Lord Jesus after His baptism was to embark on a new life and it also presented many opportunities to stray away from the love of the Father. A subtle arrow attempted to cast a doubt on the Lord's relationship with the Father. If the Lord Jesus had no doubt about His Sonship He was to turn stone into bread. The real answer to our hunger is the Lord Jesus, the bread of life. Secondly, He was tempted to receive power and splendour of the world from Satan. On the surface power and splendour in the world seem to belong to Satan, the reality is that it belongs to God alone who prefers to keep quiet when His authority is challenged. Thirdly, our Lord Jesus was tempted to risk His life in the surety that God's angels would rescue Him. The Lord would have faced this temptation right through His passion when on numerous occasions He could have given up His life and died before His crucifixion. I believe that these temptations, though they are shown to be limited to this period of time in the Lord's life, would have presented themselves to the Lord Jesus throughout His ministry. The temptation to misuse his miraculous abilities, the temptation to misuse the power and the relationship He had with the Father and the temptation to give up and trust that all would still be fine and mankind would be saved.

How did the Lord Jesus fight these temptations? He declared the Word. At the beginning of every answer He said, "It is written." How were the Israelites made to offer their sacrifice by declaring the prayer Moses offered them? How are we to face the changing circumstances of our spiritual journey, the temptations of Canaan and of the devil? We face them by declaring the Word, loudly and clearly.

Romans 10:8-13 gives us the key to spiritual warfare telling us that the Word is near us, in our mouth and heart that if you declare with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, then you will be saved. The passage declares further that no one who relies on this will be brought to disgrace. Like the Psalmist, let us declare 'Be with me Lord in my distress' and let us take this word to heart. It simplifies our entire religious experience. The Lord is asking us to believe His Word and declare it over every situation and through this we will receive strength and deliverance.

***Prayer: Abba Father, I want to live a life that is not dependant on the comforts around but upon Your providence and love. Give me the grace to declare Your praise, thank You and claim Your promises every day in my life. Amen.***

“...whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

**Matthew 25:40**

Lev.19:1-2, 11-18

Ps.19:8-10, 15

Matt.25:31-46

In today's First Reading the Israelites are called to be holy, as the Lord God is holy. Obeying the commandments of God, is the sure way to achieve holiness and eternal life. In Leviticus 19:11-18 are the commandments that we need to observe towards our neighbor. It all sums up to loving your God and loving your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18).

In the Gospel reading the Lord Jesus speaks of the end times and the judgment of the nations. He says, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me. The Lord Jesus conveys to us clearly that our approach or attitude towards our 'least brother/sister' will determine whether we will inherit eternal life or eternal punishment on the Day of Judgment. Who is this 'least brother/sister' of mine? Is it not the least talented one; the helpless one; the fragile/weak one; the addicted one; the fearful/timid one; the sinful/broken one that the Lord Jesus Himself has placed in our earthly lives, to mingle with us?

We do not realize and easily forget, that when we reject and hate our addicted/fallen husbands/wives/children that we are rejecting the Lord Jesus. When we do not look after our aged parents and leave them to live lonely lives by themselves, we are deserting the Lord Jesus Himself. When we use women/children as objects of lust and abuse/insult them, we are crucifying the Lord Jesus. These instances are endless and we have failed to obey the commandments of God, our pathway to eternal life.

Recently a friend of mine shared with me this experience. He got a call from this person, someone whom we can call 'least brother' according to today's Gospel. At that time my friend grudgingly answered the call. Later he realized that this person was desperate and had chosen him among many to find consolation and prayers for an unexpected tragic event of his life. The Lord Jesus chose to visit my friend through this person and he could have easily missed it. Even in my own life I have to admit many times I have avoided to answer calls received from my 'least brother/sister'. How easily we forget we are actually avoiding the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Today let us repent for our selfish way of life and turn to our Lord and ask Him to empower us to love Him and our neighbor as much as He loves us.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, I rejoice in Your statutes than rejoicing in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and draw my mind to Your ways. Amen.*

The Word will not return empty, but will accomplish God's purpose....

Isaiah 55:10–11

Psalms 34:4–7,  
16–19

Matthew 6:7–15

One day while driving to office I watched the rain fall on the windscreen. Suddenly it occurred to me that these drops fall all the way from the sky, but do not damage the glass. However, if a small fruit falls from a tree or someone threw the tiniest stone from maybe a hundred times lesser the distance, it could damage the vehicle. This reminded me of the marvel of God's creation.

In Isaiah, the Lord compares His Word to rain, which waters the earth and makes plants flourish to provide fruit. Similarly when the Word of God nourishes and becomes alive in us, then God's plan and purpose for us is fulfilled. We could compare ourselves to a seed which is buried in the ground, dies to itself and becomes a plant. This is like our journey and we could think that attending prayer meetings and serving is the place we need to be at and be content with ourselves. But the Lord has a further plan – for us to yield fruit and in-turn nourish others. For all this, we need to allow the 'rain' or the Word of God to nourish us. It states in Matthew 6:8 "...for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." We need the Word of God first. We may think that if we have just a slightly higher salary we could make ends meet or maybe if we did not have this crisis then we could serve God better or maybe even be able to help people more. The Lord reminds us in Matthew 16:26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Without allowing the Word of God to nourish us, we would be lost.

In today's Gospel reading the Lord teaches us the way to pray. For some of us the most difficult part in the Lord's prayer could be to forgive someone. I have been in the journey for more than ten years and thought I had completely forgiven a very close person of a wrong done to me. This person never even asked for my forgiveness, and I was proud of myself that I was able to have forgiven him. On & off when I thought of my past I remembered this person and one day suddenly out of nowhere a thought dropped into my head "I could never forgive him for what he did". I was shocked at this thought. I realised that the Lord showed me an area I was not completely healed of. I gave the truth of my heart to the Lord and through the nourishment of His Word, I was able to truly forgive this person.

**Prayer: Abba Father, help me to do Your will by dwelling deeper into Your Word. Amen.**

**When God saw how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion  
and did not carry out the destruction** **Jonah 3:10**

Jonah 3:1-10

Psalm 51:3-4, 12-  
13, 18-19

Luke 11:29-32

Lent is a time of examining our conscience and true repentance coupled with traditional acts of repentance. Prophet Jonah was called by God for a mission. His mission was to call the people of Nineveh to repent of their sins.

The word shows us today that the people of Nineveh believed God and they declared a fast wearing sack cloth. The power of the whole city in repentance turned the heart of the King of Nineveh and all, from the King to the least of the city, took part in the acts of repentance. They fasted wearing sack cloth, sat in ashes, turned away from their evil ways and violence and called out aloud to God in hope of forgiveness and mercy. The Word says that when God saw what they did and how they turned away from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not carry out the destruction of the city of Nineveh.

In the Gospel reading today, the Lord Jesus refers to the troubles of the people of that time. We can see that the words of the Lord Jesus are true for all of us today. We wait for a sign to turn to God or until we are rid of our sins to come to God. Many of us took probably more than half our lives to understand that as Jonah was to Nineveh, the Lord Jesus is for us today, the biggest sign of salvation through repentance.

Prophet Jonah had to travel three days across the city to call people to repentance. The Queen of Sheba traveled from the ends of the world to hear the wisdom of King Solomon. However, many in the present day have lost sight of the Messiah who is ever present amongst us in the Holy Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament, Word of God and inside of us through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In this year of mercy, we are blessed to make avail ourselves of the gift of repentance in a mighty way during this 40 days and experience the compassion of God Almighty just as the people of Nineveh did.

As we celebrate the feast of the Seven Holy Founders of the Servite Order, let us take the example of these seven noble and rich men who obeyed the calling of God to leave their affluent city life and live a life of penance and prayer and founded an order for the Glory of God.

***Prayer: Abba Father, make me see my sin always before me and shower Your favour upon me and rebuild my broken spirit. Amen.***

**“When I cried out, you answered; you strengthened my spirit”****Psalm 138:3****Esther C: 12, 14 –  
16, 23 – 25****138: 1 – 3, 7 – 8****Matthew 7: 7 – 12**

A blessing in disguise was at work in Queen Esther's life and the Jewish nation when she was taken by force into the harem of the king. She was pushed to an unfathomable situation. Though she became king's wife, no pure Jewish girl would wish to be in that situation. We are pushed into situations totally unplanned by us. Queen Esther's life teaches us to understand the salvific plan of

God. Our surprises in life are not surprises to God who controls our lives. Queen Esther took the initiative to risk her life for the freedom of Israel. She turned to the God of Israel and repented. She remembered God's mighty deeds and favour upon Israel. She risked her life and spoke boldly to the king, her husband, about the plot against the Jewish nation. Her God was with her and God answered Queen Esther's prayer by saving Israel.

Though Esther never liked being the Queen of a pagan king, she allowed God to turn the situation into a blessing. If we are in a bad marriage or threatened by a terminal disease or burdened by a huge financial crisis or entangled in a sinful lifestyle would we allow God to turn this situation into a blessing? Could we make this our prayer?

The Lord Jesus assures us that God hears our cry and prayers. He is empowering us to be bold as Queen Esther was. She asked and she received. That same God is living today. Esther never saw God, but in our era we have seen God in Lord Jesus Christ. We don't pray blindly. We know to whom we pray. For us Catholics, we do have the real presence of God in the Holy Eucharist. We could certainly cry out to God by looking at Him. Queen Esther did not have that opportunity which we have today.

We could be mocked by people around us who don't know God when we live by faith. That's why we are called to live by faith and not by sight. Certainly God knows the future which we are clueless of. Instead of worrying about the future pray to God for faith, to understand the plan He has in all that is happening. What we see as a curse today would surely turn to a blessing if we live in the Spirit and by faith. Let's pray to God for this to be our lifestyle. When living by faith becomes natural to us we could live the golden rule in our lives, which is, "Do to others, whatever you would have them do to you".

***Prayer: Abba Father, I allow You to turn all the curses of my life into blessings towards Your church and people of God. Amen.***

**Forgive your enemies**

Ezekiel 18:21–28

Psalm 130:1–8

Matthew 5:20–26

In the Gospel discourse today the Lord Jesus gives us some powerful though difficult commandments for this Jubilee year of mercy and forgiveness. St. Mathew gives three full chapters for this particular sermon which Catholic Bible scholars describe in modern terminology as the constitution for the church or the body of Christ. In the Old Testament the Ten Commandments tell us ‘thou shall not kill’. The Lord Jesus takes this to broader internal dimensions and tells us that even if we nurture anger or bitterness against others and if we insult or humiliate them we are guilty of the same offence. God does not punish us when we go away from God and do what we want to do instead of doing God’s will. Instead we punish ourselves and make matters worse by blaming God for it.

The Lord Jesus being the great healer in body, mind and spirit knew that nursing anger, bitterness, grudges and revenge within us eventually damages and destroy us while damaging our relationship with God and others. Thus to forgive and to be merciful is good and healthy for ourselves, our relationship with God and with others. Medical science also clearly shows us today that keeping anger and grudges within ourselves eventually leads to anxiety, worry and stress which are the root causes for many diseases including terminal illnesses.

In the Gospel discourse today the Lord Jesus tells us something astounding if not seemingly impossible. He says, “if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift”. In today’s practices the scene could be at the Holy Mass. If we remember there that a brother or sister has something against us we are told to first go and make peace with them and then come and offer the sacrifices. If we do that we will experience the full blessings and grace from the Holy Mass. This commandment is somewhat impractical, therefore some scholars try to dilute it saying that reciting the “I confess” is sufficient. To go and ask for forgiveness from a person requires amazing grace and the power of humility. But when we corporate with God and do it, there will be a mighty revelation of God’s glory. He will give us the grace to do this.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, give us the power to go beyond rituals and to be merciful.*  
**Amen.**

“You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:48

Deuteronomy  
26:16–19

Psalms 119:1–2, 4–5,  
7–8

Matthew 5:43–48

Sometimes we limit God to our understanding and to those who think likewise. God somehow becomes our personal property and that is why we get so worried and judgemental about people who have fallen making their way back to the Lord. We have our own standards as to how God should treat others. But what is amazing is what the Lord Jesus explains through the Gospel- to be called His child we should be able to treat everyone alike. This is quite an irony is it not? We can easily generalise and feel comfortable and come to terms with it. But can we when we think of that one person who has spread rumours about us and ruined our lives? You might wonder if this is the one, God wants you to love. It is that person He wants you to believe will encounter the Lord.

The sad truth is those of us who represent God tend to project ourselves as holy when we too are broken and sinful. Today are we ready to change our ways? In today's Psalm the Lord gives us a beautiful prayer and a promise. As we claim the words of the Psalm let us pray for those who have hurt us deeply; people who have betrayed us. Not only are we making an effort to forgive them but also pray for God's greatest blessings upon them. As we do this the Lord ensures us through the Gospel that He will shower down a great blessing on us. That blessing is to be His child. Can one even compare the blessings we gain to the sacrifices we make? God lavishes upon us the greatest blessing of being called His child. Today let us not focus on the suffering but instead let us focus on the reward He gives us.

The Lord calls us to be perfect just as He is. A command we try to evade because we tend to think it is out of our league. But if we look at it from a different perspective and embrace this as our mission statement nothing else should matter to us, because in all we do we will strive to be like Him. The moment anger, hatred or jealousy enters us we will be led to deal with it because it contradicts our mission to be like Him. It is my experience that when I try to be holy on my own it backfires on me. Instead of being like the Lord Jesus, my flesh takes over. But when I look to Him to find holiness and not to myself, I find that He effortlessly makes me like Him. It is then that He gives my life a bigger purpose.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, we pray to grant us the Holy Spirit and stir within us to be perfect like You are. Amen.*

**“This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!”****Luke 9:35**

Gen 15:5-12, 17-18

Psalm 27: 7-9,  
13-14

Phil. 3:17 – 4:1

Luke 9: 28 – 36

God told Abraham, “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you”. He promised Abraham descendants as the dust on the earth and the land that belonged to the Canaanites. Time passed by and it seemed like God had forgotten the promises. Abraham must have been running out of excuses to give Sarah about the delay, when God visited Abraham again. Once again He promised descendants as many as the stars in the sky and the land between present day Egypt and Iraq. This time however, Abraham asked God “how am I to know that it shall be mine?” God answered him by performing an ancient ritual that Abraham was familiar with and entered into a covenant with him.

According to the ritual, those who pass in between the animals that have been cut invoke a curse upon themselves; if they break the covenant then they would be slayed just like the animals. The scripture says right before the ritual, Abraham fell into a deep sleep and God walked between the pieces of the animals. It looks like God spared Abraham from the curse and took it upon Himself. To me, this reveals the nature of God. He would rather be cursed or struck dead (if that is possible) than allowing destruction of the people. Centuries later, once again this aspect of God is revealed through the sacrifice of Christ. “By becoming a curse for us Christ has redeemed us from the curse that the Law brings” (Galatians 3:13).

In today’s Gospel reading we find the Son of God on Mount Tabor discussing with Moses and Elijah “the way in which he would soon fulfill God’s purpose by dying in Jerusalem”. At the end of His ministry of three years, the Lord Jesus came to realise that no one really understood what He was teaching them. The reasons are our fallen nature that is in rebellion to God and our spirit which has not been awakened. The solution is Christ living in us, making the impossible possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. So on Mount Tabor, the preparations began with a discussion between the Lord, Moses and Elijah.

While the fine details were being discussed, the three who were closest to the Lord woke up from their slumber to the most amazing sight they had ever seen. Overwhelmed by what they saw, they came up with the best plan they could ever think of-- to make three tents on

Mount Tabor! Often we too are overwhelmed by the ways of God that we try to serve Him in the most ridiculous ways. We offer Him our best ideas, our best resources, our greatest talents and a voice from heaven points us to the Lord and says; “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him.” God is not interested in what we can offer Him; He is interested in us living just like His Son did.

In today’s Second Reading St. Paul says “there are many whose lives make them enemies of Christ’s death on the cross”. Even as we serve the Lord, we could easily fall into this trap. No one probably knew the Lord as much as St. Peter did, but often he came across as the enemy in the ministry of Christ. He was often rebuked and put in his place. The greatness of St. Peter is actually in the way he dealt with the corrections he received from the Lord. He was older in age, more experienced in life (or so he must have thought) but the great love he had for the Lord made him “listen” even if he didn’t agree with the Lord all the time.

St. Paul continues in today’s Second Reading; “They are proud of what they should be ashamed of, and they think only of things that belong to this world.” I am certain when St. Peter offered to build the three tents, he would have been proud of himself for coming up with such a brilliant plan. When he heard the voice of God from heaven he must have realised the absurdity of his “brilliant plan” that he remained quiet. God speaks directly to our hearts today. Before we start offering our best plans and our best services, God wants us to listen to His Son. Unless we are led by the Lord, we can easily become an enemy and an obstacle to His work.

Every year, the church invites us to take a good look at ourselves, fall at His feet and give Him the truth of our hearts; our motives and drives, the pride, the arrogance, the “know-it-all attitude” and the resistance to take correction from others. It is time to accept the truth if we have become unteachable to God and an obstacle to His work. As we repent, we must allow the precious blood of the Lord Jesus to bathe our minds, our emotional centers, our spirits and bodies as we wait for the divine exchange to happen in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. When this exchange takes place in our lives our focus will shift from things of the world to the things of Heaven. We will see the plan of God more clearly and hear His voice. When this happens the brilliant plans we carried in our minds fade away. Our goal will not be to do things but instead to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and as we gaze on Him the plan of God will begin to unfold.

*Prayer: Abba Father, give me the grace to hear the voice of my Lord Jesus and to wait upon His leading. Send me the promised Holy Spirit who will be with me forever and teach me Your ways. Amen.*

Lord, speak to us. We are listening.

1 Peter 5:1-4

Psalms 23:1-3, 4-6

Matthew 16:13-19

Lord asked His disciples “who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13). The people thought that He was John the Baptist, Elijah or Jeremiah because that was all they knew. When we search for answers in our lives, our natural tendency is to look through our past experiences and from our limited knowledge.

Many of us go through the motions of religion. We go to church, we say our prayers, but we live, make choices and face life according to our own limited knowledge and understanding. The only thing we know is to listen to the voice of our own understanding. Therefore, the limited answers we have found for life have not brought us true happiness and peace. This is the reason we have broken marriages, dissatisfying jobs and messed up lives. There is another way to find the answers for our lives. It is by learning to listen to the voice of God. St Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). The Lord said, “This was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in Heaven” (Matt 16:17). St. Peter did not lean on his own understanding, but it was revealed to him by the voice of the Father.

The Father wants to speak to us and give us the answers that we are searching for. When we hear His voice and receive His divine revelations, our hearts and minds are illuminated. His voice brings His strength and anointing into our lives. The Lord said “My sheep listen to my voice, I know them and they follow me” (John 10:27). Prayer is sitting at the feet of the Lord and learning to listen to the Lord’s voice. Today the Lord has released His power into our lives, problems and crises. As we hold onto His words, we will see the glory of God in our lives.

St. Peter’s life became a blessing to God’s people. The Lord said, “On this rock shall I build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18). This is because St. Peter was led by The Lord’s voice. When we are led by the Lord, no evil and darkness can overcome us. We are enabled to love and care for God’s people entrusted to us in our families, workplaces and communities.

***Prayer: Abba Father, fill us with Your Holy Spirit today, speak to us. We want to be led by Your voice not by our own understanding. Anoint us to be shepherds of the flocks You have entrusted to us. Amen.***

**“For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”**

**Matthew 23: 12**

Isaiah 1:10, 16–20

Psalms 50:8–9,  
16–17, 21, 23

Matthew 23:1–12

In the First reading we are called to make ourselves clean, do no evil, although we are sinners. He will wash away our sins and make us white as snow if we are willing to obey His will.

The Gospel reading today is written for us and to us; the Lord Jesus first of all emphasizes that as people in authority and experts on the subject, the

Scribes and Pharisees should be listened to with respect and they should be obeyed when they teach. But the Lord Jesus says that in their behavior their example should not be followed. “Their words are bold but their deeds are few.” They have no hesitation in drawing up rules which are difficult for people to carry out but they do absolutely nothing to help in their implementation.

These are the double standards, where people set the rules which they themselves do not keep: “Do as I say, not as I do” or “You will do it because I tell you to do it”. Secondly, the Pharisees are attacked because everything they do is to attract attention to themselves. But it is all on the outside. What we call today as ‘self glory’. The message is clear: “We are better, we are holier.” But it is a shame because it is all on the outside.

They also expect special attention to be given to them: the first row in the synagogue, places of honour at banquets and special titles. We see it daily among our politicians and leaders. They are not only given these things; they soon expect them as a right.

Even ordinary people become slaves of the ‘self glory’: the brand label on the clothes they wear, the places where they live, the cars they drive and all the other consumer brands with which they surround themselves. None of these things, says the Lord Jesus, makes a person great. The greatest is the one who serves, that is, the person who uses his or her gifts for the benefit of others, whose whole life is dedicated to making this world a better place for others to live in.

As we hear the words of the Gospel today we can resolve to become more active participants in our church communities and among our neighbors sharing our gifts and bearing the burdens of leadership.

***Prayer: Abba Father, as You have said the greatest among us must be Your servant, help us today to live by Your word and live and follow You. Amen.***

“You are my God.’ In your hands is my destiny”

**Psalm 31:16**

Jeremiah 18:18–20

Psalm 31:5–6,  
14–16

Matthew 20:17–28

During this renewal period of Lent, the Lord teaches us about various areas in our life that needs fixing and healing.

The First Reading portrays to us a wounded Jeremiah, who is caught up in a whirlpool of backbiting, slandering and misunderstanding. Even as he offered his life in service to deliver the people

from God’s anger, the people continued to plot against him. He felt betrayed and was increasingly bitter on the inside.

The Gospel reading brings to us another group of people who are “indignant.” The 10 Apostles who were competing for honours are offended because James and John are trying to steal the prize from under their noses. In a certain sense they experienced betrayal.

In the Gospel the Lord Jesus gives the third prediction about his suffering. His walk to Jerusalem is his journey towards death. Where he would stretch his arms and offer himself as a sacrifice to save those who betrayed Him. We must grasp the beautiful contrast here. Earlier we saw how Jeremiah and the apostles reacted to human betrayal. But now we see a total contrast in the Lord Jesus’ behaviour. He did not grumble, He did not become indignant and He did not ask God to release His fury upon the people. He rather obeyed God’s will and accepted the pain and suffering from His hands and was ultimately strengthened to pay the price for His enemies.

Being at the receiving end of a broken promise is hard. Every negative experience pushes us to a dark place and makes us bitter from deep within. Every bitter memory that is not brought to the feet of the Lord collects in a reservoir in our subconscious - these scars later surface as insecurities, irrational fears and even push us towards sin. How then are we to move forward?

It is not possible for us to champion heartaches on our own – it is only possible through God. The Lord offered Himself on the cross so that we may be healed from the inner wounds that cause us to sin. When we bring all those wounds, rejections and heartaches to the Lord in daily prayer, He will not only heal us but also give us the grace to pray for those who caused us pain and be the bridge for their salvation.

**Prayer: Abba Father, I bring to You all the hurts and rejections of the past. Cleanse me with Your precious blood and heal me so that I may glorify You. Amen.**

“Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him.”

Psalms 1:7

Jeremiah 17:5–10

Psalms 1:1–4, 6

Luke 16:19–31

The First Reading leads us to search our heart. “Who is my God? Who do I put my trust in?” I find myself answering this question very sincerely as: “It is you Lord, my God and master and I put my complete trust in You my Father”. I am very convinced that this is the truth. However as I ponder deeper I see that this is actually a false statement that I present to myself and to others.

God is not my God at all times. I do not put my trust in God alone but in myself and in other human beings, especially when the going gets tough. I realise that my heart has tricked me. I think that I am holy and better than I really am. There is wickedness within me that even I don’t realise. In me I have thoughts that are full of judgement, these are the thoughts that I often overlook, disguise and conceal from others. I can fake it with man but I cannot fool God. To know that God knows my wicked and sinful ways and that He still loves me is a blessing beyond words.

When educational, financial and professional issues, relationship problems, sickness and various pressures of this world weigh us down, fear and anxiety sets in, stress builds, we do and say things to hurt or harm another person, we become angry and reactive and try to find quick fixes for our problems. When we put our trust in the flesh we sin, as our hearts are full of unbelief in our living God. If we do not repent of our sinfulness we stand to be judged by God and rewarded accordingly. This is a wakeup call to all of us to examine our deepest, darkest, depths and to bring before the Lord the bitter truth. Then we will be able to depend on God at all times knowing that He is our loving Father and that He will take care of our every need.

The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus remind us of the worldly pleasures we indulge in with no care for the poor, sick and the needy. God created this world and all that is in it for us to use and not to abuse. Our possessions should not be what stand against us in our life after death. Instead of making our wealth, status, class and society the food and fuel of our lusts, luxury and sensuality, it is important to do good for the poor and the sick. Let us awaken ourselves and take the warning given to us today by the living word of God keeping in mind that death favours neither the rich nor the poor.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, as I walk toward my eternal home I pray that you will grant me the grace to put my complete trust in You at all times. Amen.*

**“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”**

**Matthew 21:42**

Genesis 37: 3-4 /  
12-13 / 17-28

Psalms 105: 16-21

Matthew 21: 33-  
43/45-46

In the First Reading we see how Joseph is sold for slavery. He was being persecuted by his own brothers because he was favoured by his father. Even though he was a chosen one, they refused to love him and instead condemned him, planned to kill him but to safe guard their own interest and not carry the guilt of murder and sold him for few silver coins. The brothers became jealous of him

because of the favouritism chosen by the father.

Could Jealousy ever make you feel like killing someone? Before saying “of course not”, read the first reading again and see what happened. Ten men were willing to kill their younger brother over a robe and few reported dreams. Their deep jealousy had grown into ugly rage. Completely binding them to what was right. When we compare this episode to the parable in today’s Gospel reading, we see how the Lord Jesus preached to the evil farmers. In order to possess the fruit of the land, they plotted to kill every servant the master sent to collect the share of the crop.

Jealousy can be difficult to recognize because our reasons for it seem to make sense. However, if left unchecked, jealousy can grow quickly and this leads us to serious sins. The longer you cultivate jealous feelings, the harder it is to uproot them.

The Lord faced this same persecution due to jealousy. The Pharisees and leading priests considered the Lord Jesus a threat to them. Through the parable in the Gospel, the Lord Jesus was exposing the religious leaders’ murderous plot. The Lord Jesus refers to Him as “the stone that the builders rejected”. Although He was rejected by many people, He will become the corner stone of His new building, the Church. The Lord Jesus shows us that one truth can affect people in many ways, depending on how they relate to it. Ideally they will build on it: many, however will trip over it. And the last judgement of God’s enemies will be crushed by it. In the end, Christ, the building block will become the crushing stone. During this time of lent, let us choose the mercy and forgiveness of the Lord Jesus. He offers this mercy to us when we choose Him and feed on the love and mercy of God.

***Prayer: Abba Father, we give you all our frail thoughts and our jealousy. Give us a humble heart to accept truth and respect the talents and gifts you have given one another and use them for Your glory. Amen.***

**He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”** **Psalm 103:10**

Micah 7:14–15,  
18–20

Psalm 103:1–4, 9–12

Luke 15:1–3, 11–32

We sing to the Lord, “Who can fathom the depths of Your Love” and yet we try to understand, limit and restrain the love God has.

Most of us are not good people by nature. We have made the worst possible choices, done the worst things and struggle everyday to believe that people like us would ever get a chance at redemption. If you are struggling with guilt and shame over the mistakes you have made in the past, take heart. The Lord is speaking directly to you today through His Word.

All three of today’s readings speak to us about how enormous God’s love for us is. This brings to light how much we have misunderstood and limited His love according to our own puny understanding. In 1 John 4:8, St. John does not say that God “feels” love or even that He “has” love, but instead he goes to the extent of saying that God “is” love. If we really want to know the truth, God’s Word is the only thing that can be our point of reference.

I will share with you the experience of a friend of mine with her permission. She was 21 years old when she began an affair with an older man and she conceived a baby out of wedlock. She thought the shame of having a child out of wedlock was too great, since she had grown up in a devout Catholic family. She decided to terminate her pregnancy. Thereafter she could not get over what had happened. Her life was hell. The shame, guilt and self hate were overwhelming. She wanted to end her life but she was too afraid. Sheer desperation drove her to come to a retreat where she heard for the first time in her life the words “Come as you are, I love you.” As she listened to the parable of the prodigal son being preached, she saw the Father running out to meet her, unconcerned about her dirty state. He embraced her, covered her nakedness with His righteousness and restored her daughterhood. Her life today radiates with God’s presence.

Today, the Lord calls you to come to Him and give Him the whole truth. Refuse to accept what your understanding is telling you. He is waiting for you. Just run into His arms. Our Lord Jesus does not know how to stop loving you.

***Prayer: Abba Father, help me to never falter in my faith in Your love and forgiveness. Amen.***

**When God calls us to a mission...**

Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15

Psalm 103:1-4, 6-8, 11

1 Corinthians 10:1-6,  
10-12

Luke 13:1-9

Today's readings tell us a story of being called by God and what our response should be. God has given each of a free will to make our own choices.

Today's First Reading tells us about God's call to Moses. I once heard Rev. Fr. Joseph from the Divine Retreat Centre say in one of his sermons that the Lord calls a person to a mission because

someone else in the world cried out for help to the Lord. When the people of Jerusalem cried out to God when the wall of Jerusalem had been destroyed, God called Nehemiah to rebuild the wall. When the people of Israel cried out for a Saviour, God first called the Blessed Mother to bring the Saviour into the world. The same is true of God's call to Moses. The Israelite people sincerely cried out to God to save them from the hand of the Egyptians and God's answer to that cry was His mission for Moses. In the same way, the Lord has called us to complete a specific mission in His Kingdom because somewhere someone cried out to the Lord for an answer. The Lord may have called us to pray and intercede for a specific person. He has placed that mission in our hearts because somewhere someone cried out to God telling Him they were unable to pray for themselves. God's answer to that person was calling us to pray and intercede. Today, whether you have received your mission from God or are waiting for God to give it to you, remember that through your calling someone's prayer will be answered. God will fit people together like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. One will be an answer to another's cry for help.

Each of us have a free will to decide whether or not we want to respond to the mission of God. When God called Moses at the burning bush, Moses could have rejected his call, turned around and walked away from God. But even though he was apprehensive about taking on the mission, he did not entirely reject it. Moses indeed had many questions as to how he would fulfill this rescue mission and many excuses as to why he was not the best person for the job, but not once did he refuse. God worked with him, answering each of his questions, making him ready for his mission. In the same way, when God calls us we can either say yes or no to His call. If we chose to say no, we are losing out on the great plan of God. If we say yes, God will surely use us to become catalyst for others to experience His love, security and providence.

Today's Psalm tells us that it is the Lord "who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion" (v.3-4). Sometimes, when we are first called by the Lord to do something, our first thought may be 'why would the Lord call a sinner like me?' We may feel unworthy and too sinful to accept the call of the Lord. But today's Psalm answers this feeling of inadequacy inside us by saying the Lord is someone who forgives our sins and redeems us from the sinful people we were and crowns us with His love and compassion. Once we have experienced God's love and compassion, our hearts will long to fulfill the mission of the Father-- firstly, to bring others who feel unworthy to the feet of God.

Today's Gospel reading tells us about the unproductive fig tree. The fig tree represents you and me, whilst the vineyard owner represents God the Father. The Lord Jesus tells us that the owner of the vineyard was passing by this fig tree for the 3rd time. Each time he came by he had hoped to find some ripened fruit that would show that this fig tree was productive but each time he came there was no fruit. In the same way, in our lives, the Lord plants us in a place where He can use us for the mission of God. At different times of our lives He comes to call us to a mission. If our response is no or full of excuses, we are like the fig tree that bore no fruit. We are only taking from the Lord, but never giving back. God patiently waits for us to say yes to Him. But how long should He wait for us? He waits our entire lifetime for us to take up His mission. If we don't, like the fig tree that is cut down, we too may be unable to enter the Kingdom of God. Each day the Lord gives us a new chance to repent and come to Him. Every day is a new day to accept the mission of God in our lives and live the plan God has for us. This Lent, the Lord is calling us to make a choice. Are we going to do our will or His will? Lent is a time when we can come back to Him and accept His mission for our lives.

Today, as we sit before the Father in prayer, we can pray Nehemiah's prayer and ask Him to show and prepare us for the mission He has for our lives. First we must remember who God is. By doing this we can rise above our situations and problems. Second, we must repent for our sins. When we repent we are creating space inside ourselves for a divine encounter. Thirdly, we can remember what God has promised us. Then we are not looking inside ourselves or around us; instead we are focusing on God. Finally, we can intercede for a direction from God and wait for Him to speak to us.

***Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that my mind and heart be open to the mission You have for me in this world. I pray for the grace to say yes to Your call and the strength to accomplish it. Amen.***

“As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God”

Psalm 42:2

2 Kings 5:1 – 15

Psalm 42: 2 – 3, 43:  
3 – 4

Luke 4: 24 – 30

Our life situations are always determined by God. We, who lived in comforts once, could be in a situation of the Israelite slave girl's situation. Our life situation isn't an issue if we receive it from the hands of the Lord Jesus.

Thanks be to the God of Israel that the little girl from Israel was the servant girl of Naaman's wife.

If not for that little slave girl, they would not have known the power of the God of Israel. This little girl, regardless of her life situation continued to be a blessing to her surrounding and brought glory to the living God of Israel.

Naaman, prominent as he was, used to command his subordinates. It was difficult for him to obey the prophet and he was offended because he was not properly welcomed by the prophet. What is God trying to teach us through this incident? Was Naaman humbled? Yes, he was. There again he was told by a servant to do a simple act in obedience.

When Naaman did what he was told to do he was healed. The scripture says that his flesh was healed to that of a little child. When our internal attitudes, which are corrupted, selfish and ambitious change and we humble ourselves to obey God, we are cleansed to be new persons. The healing of Naaman's skin disease and that whole story is a lesson for us today.

We could be in a downtrodden life situation or prominent but with a shameful note in our life that cannot be erased. We have hope in God. God is pleased with us but are we ready to accept His direction? Shall we change our approach to life today? Could we thank and praise God for our life situation and use it to be a blessing to the people around us?

Why did God choose the widow of Zarephath? Why was Naaman chosen to go to Elisha for cure? Lord Jesus speaks of God's mercy. St. Luke gave hope to the Gentiles who accepted Christianity at the time this Gospel was written. Naaman wasn't a Jew, but was healed by the power of Israel God. If we have rejected God and we feel that we are not in favour of God, today the mercy of God embraces us. God is love and He loves the whole world.

**Prayer: Abba Father, I reject You often yet Your mercy embraces me and makes me whole. Amen.**

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## **Pray these verses on God's Love - Shown Through Jesus Christ**

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved—

1 John 4:9-11 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

### **God Loves and Cares For Us**

Zephaniah 3:17 The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Job 34:19 who shows no partiality to princes, nor regards the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of his hands?

Psalms 86:15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

1 John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.